



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

George Washington Birthplace National Monument
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George Washington Birthplace - News Release

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Birthplace Celebrates New Year's Day Colonial Style

If the beginning of spring seems to you to be a better time than the beginning of winter start the New Year—you are right in step with the ancestors of George Washington who did just that until 1752.

Come to George Washington Birthplace National Monument on Saturday, March 26, 2011 to help the George Washington Birthplace National Monument 4-H Heritage Club ring in the New Year Colonial style with a variety of costumed demonstrations like hearth cooking, dancing and games.

In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII instituted the calendar we now use. It included several innovations and reinstituted the ancient Roman tradition of celebrating New Years Day on January 1. Before then March 25—the Feast of the Annunciation—was observed as the beginning of the year. For the sake of astrological and seasonal consistency and accuracy, the calendar was advanced 10 days.

Protestant England (and all of its colonies) did not follow the leadership of the Pope, and, as a result, was entirely out of sync with the rest of the world. "It is the same confusion we now have between metric and English measurements," points out Park Ranger Dick Lahey. "By the time George Washington was born, the English speaking world was slowly beginning to recognize that the rest of the world acknowledged January 1 as the beginning of the year and had a novel way of expressing any date before March 25. That's why Washington's birthday was recorded as



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as February 11, 1731/2 in the family Bible.” England and English America still did not add the extra days until 1752, so George Washington had the luxury later in life of celebrating either February 11 or 22--or both--as his birthday.

Confused? Don't worry, you can celebrate either the beginning of spring—or New Years Day—with the 4-H Heritage Club starting at 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. on Saturday, March 26. Admission is always free.

George Washington Birthplace National Monument is located on Route 204, 2 miles off of Route 3, 38 miles east of Fredericksburg, VA and 11 miles west of Montross, VA.

Additional information about George Washington Birthplace National Monument is available by phone at (804) 224-1732 or on the web at www.nps.gov/gewa.